



NOAA's National Ocean Service

ROUNDTABLES

SUMMARY: ENHANCING OCEAN VALUE *and* VITALITY

On Thursday, February 12, 2004, NOS Assistant Administrator Dr. Richard W. Spinrad hosted the third NOS Constituent Roundtable, "Enhancing Ocean Value and Vitality," at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, DC. Twenty constituents joined Dr. Spinrad, in addition to seven representatives of NOS and NOAA. Following is a summary of the major points discussed there.

Opening Remarks

In his opening remarks, Dr. Spinrad discussed both internal and external NOAA issues that affect the NOS program. The first was NOS's FY 2005 budget request, which is 35 percent less than the FY 2004 budget. The bulk of the reduction resides in earmarks that were not requested by the President, but exist in the FY 2004 budget recently passed by Congress. Excluding these earmarks, the budget reduction for NOS is about 4 percent. Dr. Spinrad also discussed fundamental changes that will affect future NOS activities and priorities as NOAA adopts the new Program Planning, Budgeting and Execution System (PPBES). Finally, a new NOAA Research Review Team has been created, composed of both NOAA and external reviewers, to produce a report that describes the current state of NOAA research and provides specific recommendations for improvements. The Research Review Team's preliminary report to the NOAA Science Advisory Board is available on the NOAA Web site. Dr. Spinrad also discussed his goal for NOS to become the global leader in integrated management of the oceans, particularly in the area of earth observation systems.

The major external issue is the upcoming report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, to be published in the next few months. The NOAA Ocean Council has developed anticipatory comments to expected Commission recommendations to create a unified NOAA voice. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is the lead agency for the President's response to the Commission's report. Dr. Spinrad added that whereas NOAA is strong on technical issues, several uncertainties remain with respect to any governance proposals the Commission may offer.

Constituent Observations

Program Planning, Budgeting and Execution System

The new NOAA Program Planning, Budgeting and Execution System (PPBES) is causing some confusion for NOS constituents. They do not understand the new process, nor do they know how they can offer their views on future NOAA priorities. The constituents expressed concern about future funding and support of NOAA programs that fail to have explicit authorization language. They were also unclear about the nature of integration between NOAA Line Offices as well as strictly NOAA programs.

Education

Several constituents expressed the important connection between education and the NOAA mission. By educating the public on the inherent benefits of the world's oceans and the need to conserve and sustain them, NOAA can gain the public support it needs to ensure that its programs continue. Many constituents felt that



N O S

Working for America's Coasts

strong public understanding and support are vital to develop new NOAA programs and capabilities. Several comments focused on the need for influencing formal education, including national educational standards and curriculum development.

Participants from various sectors of the ocean community offered to assist NOAA and NOS in expanding their outreach to the public and the nation's educational systems. Offers included assistance in developing an overall NOAA education strategy, better distribution of existing educational materials, developing new materials for targeted audiences, forging partnerships with new and existing education outreach networks, and developing methods to work with education standards and textbook-writing communities. A short (1-2 day) symposium was suggested as a way to bring NOAA, outside educators, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) together to discuss these issues.

NOAA and NOS Goals

One participant expressed concern about a perceived disconnect between Congress and communities as a result of NOAA lacking bold goal statements, as well as strategic plans and milestones for such goals. If NOAA, through NOS, is to lead the nation in oceanic research and sustainable use of ocean resources, the agency must identify where it intends to go and how it plans to get there. This should be done in conjunction with ocean constituents and Congress. Also, it was unclear to a few of the constituents, particularly in the state arena, as to where their energies should be directed to complement NOAA's work. A specific example of this is in the field of research. NOAA and NOS conduct a great deal of excellent research, and a few constituents mentioned how they will continue to do their best to support NOAA endeavors. The impact of NOAA research, however, is adversely affected by the lack of an overall NOAA research strategic plan that states the agency's focus, purpose, and goals.

Ocean Management

Many participants commented on different methods of ocean management. Some agreed with NOAA's focus on ecosystem-based management, although they expressed concern as to what this phrase really means. Some participants felt that insufficient information, tools, and capabilities exist to effectively implement this type of management. A few constituents approved of NOAA's current approach to implementing ecosystem-based management in evolving and incremental ways. Some NGOs are also trying to better understand ecosystem-based management and its implications. Two participants stated that ocean zoning is the potential wave of the future and that NOS should begin to examine it.

Monitoring and Observation

Monitoring and observation are important NOS responsibilities. A few constituents pointed out that monitoring should be conducted based on outcomes. Within a centralized program, better coordination would ensure that certain resources were not being used or studied for redundant purposes. One constituent highlighted the new field of restoration monitoring as something beneficial to the overall coastal community. The constituent also noted that in NOS's quest to monitor larger-scale environments, current resources should not be redirected from NOS's vital work "on the ground" in the ocean and coastal zones.

Partnerships

Several constituents talked about the extensive network of partnerships that NOS maintains between states, NGOs and academia, and how these collaborations support the resolution of issues currently facing the marine management and scientific communities. The National Marine Sanctuaries Program, National Estuarine Research Reserve System, National Marine Protected Areas, and Coastal Zone Management Program provide essential links to states and other stakeholders. States and communities have specific needs, interests and problems. NOS should continue to view its partnerships as a significant means of engaging everyone in the “ocean community” to work toward common solutions.

Closing Comments

Dr. Spinrad noted that consistent themes have emerged in the discussions at the various roundtables, including the need for enhanced education, outreach and communications efforts. He stressed the importance of public understanding of ocean issues as a key to building support for research and resource management activities, and highlighted the importance of partnerships in achieving these goals.